

# Culturally, Historically Communicating the Yoruba's Traditional Concept of Military Heroism: Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò

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**Abstract:** This article uses Fischer's narrative paradigm to analyze the traditional war leaders of the Yoruba in the south-west of Nigeria. The paradigm resonates with Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad, which stress symbolic actions. The article defines the title, highlights its origin, presents the characteristics of an Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò and tells a brief history of each holder of the title. The purpose of presenting all these is to argue that through the history and tradition of Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò of the Yoruba land, Yoruba concept of military heroism is constructed and communicated. Also, this article shows how the public react to the character of the Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò. In addition, it examines the relevance of the title in the contemporary Nigerian politics.

**Keywords:** war, bellicose, brave, courageous, tactics, trouble, culture, tradition, fear, politics, paraphernalia, title, holder(s), history

## Introduction

Ààrẹ̀!  
Ààrẹ̀!  
Orí mi, má jẹ̀ n s'Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò.  
Ààrẹ̀!  
Òlórún, má jẹ̀ n s'Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò.  
Ààrẹ̀!  
Ààrẹ̀!  
Ààrẹ̀!

Translation:

Ààrẹ̀!  
Ààrẹ̀!

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*My head (being), don't let me offend Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò.,  
 Ààrẹ̀!  
 God, don't let me offend Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò.  
 Ààrẹ̀!  
 Ààrẹ̀!  
 Ààrẹ̀!*

The lines above constitute the poetic song (panegyric) which creates a sense of awesomeness, fear, and overwhelming feeling about a formidable traditional title and the holders of it among the Yoruba of the south-west Nigeria. The song is used to launch this article which explores history to arrive at the Yoruba view or concept of heroism. Before the exploration of the history, a theoretical approach becomes imperative since the communication of the concept is what prompted the writing of this article. One theory which connects with human stories and leads to the derivation of ideas from such stories is from Walter Fischer, a communication theorist. According to Sagan (2009), Fischer's narrative paradigm means that human beings are story tellers. In fact, Sagan relays Fischer's exact expression as follows: "a theory of symbolic actions –words and/or deeds –that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, and interpret them" (in Sagan, 2009). Sagan states that Fischer's idea resonates with Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad. Dickinson (2009:126) explains Burke's pentad as "a tool of analysis made up of five elements act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose," stating the sole idea as a way to analyze human symbolic action so as to detect the motivation behind the action. Since Fischer and Burke are concerned about symbolic action, only Fischer's theory has been chosen for this article to avoid duplication. His theory is reformed in this article to include human beings as story or history makers, not just tellers. While some people tell the stories or relay the history of others in writing or in speech communication, their experiences also build stories or history that can be conveyed to others. Without any doubt, to tell stories or relay history, human beings need to communicate. As Sagan says, the stories, history, culture, biography, character and so on which they communicate have impact on how people in general think or act. Fischer's communication theory, therefore, is used as the gazing lenses for presenting this article because the Yoruba concept of traditional military heroism and their way of evaluating heroes are based on the history and/or panegyric of their cultural or traditional, war-venturing leaders.

This article argues that the history of the Yoruba Aare Ona-Kakanfo title holders communicates the Yoruba concepts of heroism by highlighting the cultural, symbolic marks which characterize their title and form the Yoruba perception of traditional military heroes. To achieve its goal, the paper offers the meaning of the title, traces its history, examines why the title is controversial and full of fearful or frightening adjectives, presents vital information about the title holders, brings to the fore common characteristics of Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò, looks at what people say about the title, explores the rituals that go with the position for idea formulation, places the Aare within the context of Èṣó, pays special attention to the last two Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò whose role in Nigeria politics has erected a foundation for a new feature or trend. In a nutshell, the paper presents an overview of Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò to project it as an aggressive, dangerous, ritualistic, controversial, heroic, and relevant institution –all derived from its history, a unique name, traditional military structure, rituals, war effrontery, paraphernalia or insignia, belief, people's perception of Kakanfò, praise poetry, the tendency to conquer and dominate the scene, and contemporary Nigeria politics.

Omolola (1987) notes that the institution of Ààré Ònà Kakanfò among the Yorùbá people connotes bravery, mystery, bizarre, war appetite, defense, tactics, chieftaincy, command or authority, traditional militarism, callousness, blood-thirstiness, restlessness, culture, controversy, capture tendency and power retention, territorial expansion, magical power exhibition, installation rituals, military dress, weapons, military operation's deadline, brutality, trouble, prowess exhibition, conflict, and attempts to dominate and conquer others. The Yoruba view the title holder as an awesome, dangerous, calculative, unpredictably predictable, domineering, magical, ritualistic, obstinate, stubborn, obdurate, bellicose, and the most brave and gallant traditional military man whose appointment, according to tradition, should be made by the Aláàfin, the king of Òyó, whose remaining geographical center can be traced to the present Òyó City in the Òyó State of Nigeria.

The traditional concept of military heroism which the Yoruba form from the history, tradition, and behavior of their Ààré Ònà Kakanfò is not peculiar to the Yoruba; it is an idea which represents traditional military heroism generally in Africa. The Yoruba or African idea of traditional military heroism may not fully resonate with westerners because of cultural differences, values, and gazing lenses. Two scholars present what appears to be a western concept of heroism:

„After polling a number of people, we discovered that heroes tend to have eight traits, which we call *The Great Eight*. These traits are *smart, strong, resilient, selfless, caring, charismatic, reliable, and inspiring*. It's unusual for a hero to possess all eight of these characteristics, but most heroes have a majority of them” (Allison & Goethals 2013).

From the perspective of Allison and Goethals, all attributes of a hero are positive. Without any link to any profession, the definition sounds generic in a way. Becker and Eagley (2004:163-178), who approach heroism from a psychologist's perspective, see a hero as a person serving others and at the same time trying to hold a status, and psychologists Jayawickreme and Stefano (2012:14) frame heroism as “an individual's commitment to a noble purpose, usually aimed at furthering the welfare of others, and involving the willingness to accept the consequences of achieving that purpose.” Even though this definition comes from westerners, the description it presents tallies with the Yoruba idea of heroism revolving around Ààré Ònà Kakanfò who, by tradition, must defend his people at all costs -fight fiercely to win or die while defending and expanding the territory of his people. The interpretation of the word “noble” as implied in the definition above may differ from one culture to another. Hence, the features of a hero and definitions of heroism may have their local peculiarities, meanings, and interpretations. Nonetheless, heroes, irrespective of locations or cultures, are people who do what others do not do or cannot do; they display courage and stand up to difficult tasks. Lieven (1998:419) asserts that “the courageous man becomes a hero.”

### **Meaning or Semantic Breakdown of the Title:**

The word “Ààré Ònà Kakanfò” came into use during the reign of Aláàfin Àjàgbó who ruled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Ogunniran 1986:12; Omolola 1987). According to Akintunde Sowunmi of Omolaso House, Ibadan, “Ààré” means “the topmost rank” or “presiding authority; “Ònà” means “the path” or “the way;” and “Kakanfò” is derived from “Kaka ni ifò” which means “strong, unstoppable jump.” Sowunmi's semantic breakdown constructs the noun phrase which is the highest military title among the Yoruba. Ààré Ònà kakanfò can be interpreted as

“The war authoritarian or commander who strongly and forcefully jumps about from one place to another, not skipping any place, or the one who is usually restless, moving with ease and in turn from one point to another” (Sowunmi). That is the simple or ordinary meaning of the title. To the Yorùbá, Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò is the over-all boss of all soldiers and all military unit commanders and their soldiers. No wonder, Johnson (1969:73) called him “Generalissimo” or “Field Marshall.” Generally, as upheld by Àdérinkòmí (1986:10) and Omololá (op cit. 35), the name Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò is reserved for the topmost, toughest military leader among the Yoruba. This makes the title holder a heroic person among the èsò and the general public. The title is strictly for a bold, powerful, and blood-thirsty military leader. Today, because of modernity and change in the institution of Aláàfin, the title has been conferred on highly influential politicians of the modern time. Only tested soldiers could occupy the position in the past, and in the modern time when there was no longer standing Yoruba traditional army, Aláàfin conferred the title on Akintola and Abiola who had taken a leading role in Nigerian politics. Participation in national politics might be a new selection criterion which Aláàfin has adopted. Whether in the past or in the present time, Aare Ona-Kakanfò is a person with exceptional abilities, whose influence often creates a charged atmosphere and two visible conflicting sides – one for him and the other against him. As the commander of one side, Aare Ona-Kakanfò is a hero because all public actions revolve around his personality and ideology, and his voice and actions dictate the tune for those on his side while those against him are not at peace as long he lives or as long as they oppose him.

### Pre-Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò Era:

Odùdùwà, the founder of the Yoruba country, made Olúkòyí a defense minister and war commander, and Olúkòyí passed on the role assigned to him to his children and the generations that followed; thus, Olukoyi's traits- fearlessness, magical power, traditional weapon mastery, determination, seriousness, and interest in going to and in pursuing wars to an end extended to all members of Olúkòyí's family members. Today every generation of Olúkòyí takes pride in its inherited brave acts and power-connected qualities by proudly or boastfully saying, “Emi omo Eso Ìkòyí!” which means “I, the child of Ìkòyí Warrior!” Usually, the descendants of Olúkòyí make the expression to signal that they can accomplish difficult tasks, that they can not be taken for a ride, and that they can not be intimidated or subdued easily. The military image of Olúkòyí echoes in an extract from a popular panegyric, which the Yorùbá oral artistes crafted for the first generation of Olúkòyí:

Olúkòyí ó!  
Èsò rógún jó jìngín.  
 Àròní, omo Kún'ri-dogun.  
Èsò Ìkòyí kì í gbòfà léyìn;  
 Iwájú ní fí gbòrun!  
Omo A-kú-yán-àn-yàn-an-bòtẹ̀-lẹ̀rù.  
 Olúkòyí,  
Èsò rógúnjó jìngín,  
 Àróní, 'mò Olórí-ogun.

Meaning:

Olúkòyí!

Èsò who joyfully dances at the sight of wars.  
 Àròṇì (Medicine man), the offspring of Kún' rídogun  
 (He who leaves his hair unshaved in anticipation of war)  
 Èsò, the Warrior of Ìkòyí never gets the blow of an arrow on the back;  
 It is his front view that he uses to receive the attack of a bow!  
 The offspring of He-who dies-in- conspiracy-and-leaves-fear-behind.  
 Olúkòyí,  
 The warrior that joyfully dances at the sight of wars.  
 Magical man, the child of the one who leads others at wars.

However, during the reign of His Royal Highness, Àkèè Olúodò of Òyó, the king realized that Arùkú Oládogán who was the Olúkòyí, his war commander, was too old to lead a war. Consequently, Aláàfin requested Oládogán to nominate any of his brave and competent sons to lead the Òyó army, and as a traditional routine, Olúkòyí consulted his Ifa priest (babaláwo), and the Ifá oracle identified Sèèrèkí Àpalà of Ìgbànnà as the most suitable Olúkòyí's son to be the new commander for the army (Ògúnníran 1986:12). Sèèrèkí was brave, perfect at using weapons, strong physically and magically, and forceful like his formidable father, so he assumed the responsibility of leading the Yorùbá army. According to Ògúnníran, immediately after the installation of Sèèrèkí Àpalà as the new commander, Aláàfin sent him to wage a war. Sèèrèkí won the war and moved to other unassigned places for wars, and he won, too. When he returned late and told Aláàfin how he left one war for another, fighting and conquering places, Aláàfin commended his performance, and said that Sèèrèkí should be named "Olúkòyí kékeré tabi Àrẹ̀mọ́ tí í jà tí í fọ̀ àfòlú," which means "Young Olúkòyí or the first child that fights and continues to fight from one boundary to another." In addition, Omololá (op cit.:50), seems to agree that Sèèrèkí started as the first Kakanfò because Sèèrèkí had a special recognition which resulted or metamorphosed into the title.

### Selection and Installation Rituals

Aláàfin, with the support of his Òyó-Mèsi (chiefs-in-council), reserves the right to select a warrior to become Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò. Traditionally, in the military hierarchy, the Òtún Kakanfò, by ranking of the Èsò, is the next in command to the Kakanfò, and upon the death of one Kakanfò, he, under normal circumstances, automatically fits in as the new Kakanfò.

The installation of the Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò involves a physical and ritualistic process which is intended to empower the new Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò and make him tower above other eso. Traditionally, the installation process requires the new Kakanfò to accept incisions and medicinal concoctions on his head. Specifically, within the premises of the Aláàfin in Òyó City, any Èsò selected for the title would have the hair on his head shaved, have 201 sharp and deep incisions made on his head, and 201 medicinal concoctions rubbed into the incisions – one medicine for one cut! This process is considered as rituals or a rite of passage for the new Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò to be fearless (Johson 1969:74).

Did all the Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò pass through the rituals? Up to the time of Látòsísà's installation as Ààrẹ̀, no one would doubt that every Ààrẹ̀ appointed by Aláàfin underwent the rituals. However, the gap between Látòsísà's and Akintólá's installation marked a new trend in the Yorùbá land, as foreign ideologies had taken over in the land, and Christianity and Islam had gained ground to the extent that they had a tremendous impact in the way people perceived traditional rites. Adherent to the two religions view the ritual ceremony associated



with the Ààré Ònà Kakanfò's appointment and installation as being against the doctrines and tenets of their religions; hence, they detest the idea of any Christians or Muslims passing through the traditional process. The last two recent Kakanfò, Samuel Akíntólá, a prominent Christian and Moshood Abíólá, a devout Muslim operated within the context of their religions and Kakanfò institution. While there was little or no Christian protest at the time Akíntólá was appointed, Muslims and Christians received the news of Abíólá's appointment with mixed feelings. While some people felt that he should accept the title from Aláàfin who was also a Muslim, other people, especially Muslims, felt Abíólá should not accept the title because it had rituals that were purely unacceptable in Islam.

To make the institution fit into the reality on the ground, a new, modern dimension set in. According to Abíólá (2007:par. 3), the Aláàfin introduced a change to the conferment of the Ààré Ònà Kakanfò title, and the king gave an explanation for the new trend: "The institution of the *aare ona kakanfo*, the generalissimo of the Yoruba, has also had to change since the treaty of 1893 signed by my grandfather, King of Yoruba country, which put an end to intertribal and internecine wars." Abíólá states further that Aláàfin told the crowd that witnessed the Kakanfò Abíólá's installation that "men are still conferred the title to help advance the progress of the kingdom, even in times of peace (op cit.: par. 13). To show that the installation rituals changed when Moshood Abíólá was installed, Hafsat Abiola (op cit.:10), the daughter of the late Kakanfò, also states:

„The videos of the fourteenth ceremony do not show the physical preparation of the candidate, Moshood Abíólá. Indeed, it is doubtful that the recipient who is also a businessman allowed 201 incisions to be made onto his "occiput" or his head to be shaved everywhere but "the inoculated part." He is seen wearing a Yoruba *fila*, not an *ojijiko*. He does not carry a staff invincible nor does he wear a leopard skin apron. A possible concession to the traditional regalia is the geometric patterns of his garment, especially his *fila* (cap) which shows bold geometric shapes that might be a leopard motif."

### **Dressing and Paraphernalia of Office:**

Traditionally, Ààré Ònà Kakanfò's appearance is distinct among the *èṣó* because of his paraphernalia of office and dress codes. His unique dressing and other insignia of office place him on the highest level of command. After the installation, Ààré Ònà Kakanfò keeps the routine of shaving the hair on his head, leaving "ààsó" (hair tuft) on the head, wearing "sòkòtò" (what Americans know as pant) made of a leopard skin, sitting on a leopard skin, wearing a long cap ("Ojijiko") made of the parrot's red feathers, and carrying with him "*òpá iségún*" (*òdùro*) which means "the weapon of victory." It is only this weapon that he carries to any war, not gun. Also, he ties charms round his body and wraps his body up with magical clothes when he is in the house (Aderinkomi 1986:11). The leopard skin is a common dress feature of Ààré Ònà Kakanfò. Samuel John writes that Kakanfò wears coronet ("Akòro"). Keeping strictly to this tradition extended to Aare Ona kakanfò Látòsísà, the last of the old-era Ààré Ònà Kakanfò. In spite of modernity at the time Akíntólá became Kakanfò, the dress elements of the ancient was still a part of his installation. Akinlolú Ajé (1987:9) states that when Samuel Ládòkè Akíntólá was installed as Kakanfò, the cap he wore was made of a leopard skin. In addition, Akíntólá was given "awa," a shield to protect himself from cutlasses, spears, arrows, and other dangerous weapons of war. Even though there was no standing Yoruba army like it was in the past, Akintola received war weapons! Moshood

Abíólá's way of dressing was different. He wore "filà òribí," not "ojijiko." Abíólá neither carried any staff invincible nor wore a leopard skin apron. The only thing similar to the regalia was the geometric patterns of his garment, especially, his fila (cap) which shows bold geometric shapes that might be a leopard motif (Abiola 2007:par. 10).

### **Composition of Office Holders:**

All occupiers of the Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò office have shown bravery in troublous times, so they are heroes among the Yorùbá. Even Kúrunmí and Àfònjá who turned against Aláàfin proved their mettle as Kakanfò by being fearless and being war mongering. Both died gallantly while fighting for their course. In all, they are sixteen in number.

### **Sèèrẹ̀kí Àpàlà of Ìgbànnà:**

Sèèrẹ̀kí was the son of Olúkòyí Arùkú Oládògán. The old age of Seereki's father prompted Seereki's appointment as the over-all military commander of the Yoruba army. His appointment by Aààfin Àké Olú-odò gave birth to a new military title that co existed with the Olúkòyí title (Òguúnníran 1986; Omololá 1987) While his father retained his title, Seereki proved his mettle as an emerging military authority per excellence. Because he successfully led the Yorùbá army, fought gallantly, used his initiatives, attacked, and conquered unassigned places, Aláàfin said Sèèrẹ̀kí should be renamed as "Aremo ti i ja ti fo afolu," which literally means "the premier child who fights endlessly and jumps comfortably and aggressively from one boundary to another. This might have prompted the idea that he should be regarded as the first Kakanfò.

### **Kòkòrò-gangan of Ìwòyè (Àkekèé Òde Ìwòyè):**

The son of an Ègbá woman, Kokoro-gangan (Scorpion) was the first person officially addressed as Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò. He had the title after the death of Sèèrẹ̀kí Àpàlà. He was a nephew to Aláàfin Àjàgbó who appointed him as Kakanfo. The most popular war he led was called "Ogun Ìwéré" which occurred in 1650 (Ogunniran 1986:13). He was a tough man. He destroyed Ìkèrèkú (his mother's birth place), Ile Olópa, and Ònkò.

### **Ọyátópé of Ìwòyè:**

Ọyátópé was a son of Kòkòrò-gangan. He was as powerful as his father, so he succeeded his father as Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò, and Ìwòyè was destroyed while he was Kakanfò.

### **Ọyálàbí of Àjàsé-Ìpo (Ọyá'àbí):**

Oyálàbí was born in Àjàsé-Ìpo, a town in the present day Kwara State of Nigeria. According to Gbádébo, a descendant of Kakanfo, Oya'abi left Ajase-Ipo for the present Ajase near Ògbómòsò because of a chieftaincy tussle at the former. He helped Alaafin Abiodun Adegoolu to overcome the too-powerful Basòrun Gáà of Oyo. Because Kakanfò was ill, he died on his way to Ọyó when he was going there for an honor Aláàfin wanted to bestow upon him.

### **Adéta Lángbin of Jàbàtá:**

He was the first native of Jàbàtá to hold the title of Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò and the first ruler of the town. According to Baálè Òkésolá Àkanó, the ruler of Jàbàtá near Ògbómòsò, Àdéta was officially installed as Kakanfò in Òyó-Ilé. He was always war tasty; consequently, Jàbàtá became a destroyed place because of the wars he fought. When the town scattered, Àdéta moved to another Jàbàtá which is now in the present-day Òyó City. Two of his children were Sàlakó and Yetúndé Àtándá. His “oríkì” was “Yawú olóogun; sìni Ògún bá wón dá bùru èjẹ,” which literally means “Yawú, the warrior; the well-dressed Ògún who makes them (enemies) spill blood profusely.”

### **Ìbítòlá Òkú of Jàbàtá (Ò-kú-láárò-jí-lálé):**

He was the son of Adéta Lángbin. He succeeded his father as Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò. He continued the war his father fought and died in Jàbàtá.

### **Àfònjà of Ìlorin:**

Àfònjà was maternally a prince of Òyó. He was very powerful; he requested for the position of Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò, and he was installed in 1817 during the reign of Aólẹ̀ (Elphinstone 1921:15). Alaafin Aole disliked him because of his growing power, so Alaafin planned to have him killed by sending him to fight at Iwere that had very powerful soldiers. Àfònjà, with the connivance of Oníkòyí and Òyó chiefs, rebelled against the center and disgraced Aole, and this led Aole to curse Afonja and his supporters before Aólẹ̀ committed suicide. Among the people who helped Àfònjà to fight against the towns under the control of Alaafin was Alufa Alimi, a Fulani religious leader who had strong Muslim warriors and made the service of his soldiers available to Àfònjà (op cit.). Unfortunately, his former helpers (Muslim militants) became too powerful in Ìlorin, so Àfònjà lost though gallantly his life in the attempt to regain his authority over Ìlorin (Omolola 1987:65).

### **Tóyẹjẹ̀ Àkànní Alébiósù of Ògbómòsò:**

He was the king of Ògbómòsò from 1797 to 1825. As Òtún Kakanfò, he became Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò after the death of Àfònjà. His first mission was to free Ìlorin which the Fùlání had seized from the Yorùbá, but unfortunately the Yorùbá were not united, so they could not succeed in getting back what belonged to them (Oyerinde 1934:29). He led the following wars: Ogele and Rùnyererùnyere or Mùgbámùgbá. Fulani won both wars. He also led “Pamo War”, which occurred because of a disagreement he had with Oníkòyí. He also invaded and subdued Ede where people refused to pay tributaries. He died peacefully.

### **Edun of Gbógùn-ún:**

Contrary to tradition, during the kingship of Aláàfin Amodo, Edun of Gbógùn-ún was appointed as Kakanfò by Oníkòyí Adégún while Tóyẹjẹ̀ that Aláàfin installed was still parading himself as Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò, so there were two Kakanfò at a time – one for Aláàfin and one for Oníkòyí! Edun led Gbógùn-ún war, scattered Esièlẹ̀, he but died at Gbódó while he was attempting to go and invade Ìlorin that succeeded in bringing Ikoyi under it.



### **Òjó Amépowuyì of Abemò:**

He was one of the top-ranking military officers under Kakanfò Àfònjá. He captured Èpo from Aláàfin and established his authority (Kakanfò's). He also captured Iware, Okiti, Ajerun, Koto, and Ajabe that were close to Ijaye. (Johnson 1969:234). He adds that Edun liked wearing his red clothes made of charms.

### **Kurunmí of Ìjàyè:**

Aláàfin Àtibà who promised Kúrunmí the title of Ààrè Ònà Kakanfò during the Eléduwè war conferred the title on Kúrunmí around 1840 (op cit.:283; Obateru 1982:21). Kúrunmí combined political, religious, and military powers. He was merciless to anybody who committed even the least sin. In addition, he was blood thirsty, for his common punishment was to kill sinners. As merciless as he was to many sinners and to many highly placed people, he was lenient to the poor or ordinary people. He was very skillful, magically forceful, and physically powerful at wars. He had the habit of suppressing any power that would rival his. Upon the request of Olúyòlé of Ìbàdàn, Kúrunmí supported the Ìbàdàn army against the Ìjèbú and the Ègbá soldiers who attacked Ìbàdàn, and Ìbàdàn was able to defeat Máyè at Gbánámú. He also fought "Àrákangá war" against Ondese that he envied because the latter had a unique, dangerous spear that was gaining popularity. (Johnson 1969:251-53). He also led the Bátèdó war against the Ìbàdàn army because he refused to pay tributaries to Olúyòlé of Ìbàdàn (op cit 297). Kúrunmí and his soldiers defeated the Ìbàdàn army. However, Kúrunmí faced a looming danger and eventually, despite his prowess, died at a war in Ìjàyè because he refused to recognize Adélù, the first son of Aláàfin Àtibà, as a new king in Òyó. Culturally, Aláàfin's first son should die with his father, but the arrangement Àtibà made changed the culture, for Adélù succeeded his father as Aláàfin. Because of this incident, Kakanfò rebelled against Aláàfin, and the people of Ìjàyè came up with a song that expresses the mind of the community.

Àtibà, mǎà tí í kú o o o;  
 Dúró d'Adélù;  
Omo-oba ní í boba kú!  
 Dúró d'Adélù;  
 Àtibà, mǎà tí ì kú o o o;  
 Dúró d'Adélù;  
Omo-oba ní ì bóa kú!

Meaning:

Atiba, don't die now;  
 Wait for Adelu;  
 A king's son must die with the king!  
 Wait for Adelu;  
 Atiba, don't die now;  
 Wait for Adelu;  
 A king's son must die with the king!

### **Olúyedún of Ìbàdàn:**

Oluyedun was a son of Kakanfo Afonja. He was the first Kakanfo in Ibadan. His tenure as Kakanfo was short, so he could not cause any trouble like his father (Akinyele 1951:31). According to Johnson, Oluyedun made a request that he wanted to occupy the position which his father had held (1969:244).

### **Òjó Aburúmákú Olánnípá Àdió of Ògbómòsò:**

Òjó was too tough and regarded as a wicked person, so people labeled him “Aburumaku,” which literally means “The wicked one who does not die.” He was bale Ògbómòsò, the ruler of Ogbomoso (Oyerinde 1934:104). He was magically powerful and rich. According to Oyerinde, Ojo spent his money to compete for the Aare Ona Kakanfo position, and Alaafin Adelu allowed him to occupy it (109). Although he did not engage in wars outside Ogbomoso, he sent Ajayi Olubao to Ijebu War in 1866 and the later died there. Aburumaku also sent the Ogbomoso army to invade Ilesa in 1867 (?). His reign witnessed the Roti riot in Ogbomoso because he promised to kill Roti. Aburumaku was struck by a thunderbolt when he was at a conflict with Fami, his powerful friend in Igbe. Although Aburumaku did not die immediately, his sickness after the thunderbolt attack led to his eventual death (op cit.:110).

### **Látòsìsà (Látòósà) of Ibadan:**

Látòósà was the second Ìbàdàn man who became Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò. Before getting the position, he was Òtun Kakanfò, the second in command (Akinyele 1951:88). He was a native of Ilora (Falola and Oguntomisin 1984:54). According to Johnson, “Latosisa usurped the title of Kakanfò by might over right, by displacing Ojo Aburumaku ... He sent to Ojo for all insignia of the office, which Ojo was obliged to resign to him, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> 1871, he was publicly installed (op cit.:387). His reign as Aare Ona Kakanfo witnessed a significant number of wars. Akinyele states that Latosisa fought the following wars: Ado War, Emure War, and Ogedengbe War 1 in 1874; Eletu War in 1876; Igbe Igbin War and Atadi War in 1877; Igbe Esinle (Osiele) War in 1878; Jalumi War in 1878-1879; Ekiti Parapo or Kiriji War in 1880-1893 (1951:90). He died at Kiriji war on August 11, 1885.

### **Samuel Ládòkè Akíntólá of Ògbómòsò:**

Akíntólá became Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò in August 1964. Aláàfin Gbádégesin Second installed Akíntólá as Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò when a political conflict between Akíntólá and Obáfẹ́mi Awólówò had degenerated into a serious, cloudy atmosphere in the Yorùbá land. Unlike previous Kakanfò, Ládòkè Akíntólá was a product of western education, modern ideas, Christianity, and politics; he was never a military man or a traditional “eso.” He marked the beginning of modern Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò because he became the first Kakanfò after the political power and the authority to command the tradition army had given its way to a new system introduced by the British authority that imposed its rule on Nigeria in which Aláàfin’s territory fell. Although Akíntólá did not engage in the kind of wars his predecessors led, he was involved in a strong political confrontation that destabilized the political atmosphere of the Yorùbá and the entire Nigeria. Specifically, in the Western part of Nigeria, his disagreement Awólówò split the people of the region into two – pro-Awolowo and pro-Akintola. Consequently, an event tagged “Wild, Wild West” erupted and led to house burning and the chasing and killing of people. The aftermath of the incident was a glaring division

which continued years even after both were dead. Akintola was a very brave, eloquent, magical, and powerful man. His politics transcended the Yoruba land. According to Akíntólá (1982:114), one day when Ládòkè Akíntólá's car was moving on a road in Ìbàdàn, people who opposed Ládòkè started stoning him with different objects. As a brave person, he alighted from the car and walked toward the crowd of people throwing stone and other objects at him. Confusion reigned, and the people ran and dispersed. He also showed his bravery when his party and the opposition party met in Òyó City for their campaigns. Òyó was a stronghold of the opposition party. Akintola went to where the opposition members were doing their campaign, and upon sighting him, the opposition members started making a ridiculous shouting against him. Akíntólá told his driver to stop. As the driver stopped, he stepped out of the car and made his way toward the members of the opposition. Within a twinkling of an eye, everybody had disappeared. Galantly, he died in a military coup d'état in Nigeria on January 15, 1966 and was buried in his home town, Ògbómòsò (op cit.:115).

### **Moshood Kásimáawòó Abíólá of Abéòkúta:**

Moshood Kásimáawòó Àbíólá of Abéòkúta became Kakanfo on January 14, 1988. His installation was performed by Aláàfin Lámídì Adéyemí, Abíólá was the first Ègbá to hold the title. The news of his selection for the position generated divergent views nationwide. While many people felt that Abíólá's religion (Islam) was not in line with a traditional title that would involve rituals and the worship of the god of iron –Ògún- and other deities, others felt western ideas and foreign religions in the Yorùbá land had greatly interfered with and changed Yoruba culture and traditional institutions, that Aláàfin could go ahead to install Abíólá as Kakanfò; thus, the controversy which preceded Abíólá's installation might have prompted the statement which Aláàfin Lámídì Àdéyemí made during the official ceremony announcing Abíólá as the new Ààrẹ Ònà Kakanfò. Aláàfin Adéyemí declared to the crowd that the institution of Aláàfin had to change from what it used to be because of unavoidable changes. According to Abíólá (2007:par. 3), Alaafin defends the new trend:

„Presenting the title, the Alaafin of Oyo prefaced his remarks with a statement on the changes in Yoruba traditional institution. According to him, change is the only permanent thing in life of men, institutions and the world at large, and no institution in Nigeria has been more affected by change than the institution of the Alaafin, probably more than any traditional institution in Nigeria. But the Alaafin is prepared to change with the times rather than be a victim of change. The institution of aare ona kakanfo, the generalissimo of the Yoruba, has also had to change.”

The changes that touched the institution of Ààrẹ Ònà Kakanfò is succinctly presented in the excerpt below:

„The ceremony was very different from the traditional ones recorded by Johnson in several aspects. The videos of the fourteenth (?) ceremony do not show the physical preparation of the candidate, Moshood Abiola, Indeed, it is doubtful that the recipient who is also a businessman allowed either 201 incisions to be made onto his “occiput” or his head to be shaved everywhere but “inoculated part.” He is seen wearing Yoruba fila, not an ojijiko. He does not carry a staff invincible nor does he wear a leopard skin apron. A possible concession to the traditional regalia is the geometric patterns of his garment, especially his fila (cap) which shows bold geometric shapes that might be a leopard motif.” (op cit.: pars 9-10).

Hafsat Abíólá added that the traditional poetry rendition that was a part of Abíólá's installation lacked a statement of the ancient rules about battles, that Lanrewaju Adepoju who rendered Yorùbá poetry performance during the officially installation ceremony incorporated only the achievements of the new Kakanfò (par 11).

### **Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò among the Eso:**

Èsó is the Yoruba word for a warrior or warriors. Johnson (1969:73) states that the Yoruba warriors within the territory of Oyo rank next to the Oyo-Mesi who are the second in command to Alaafin. Eso, otherwise known as "Iba," is a soldier who is brave and can fight gallantly. In a nutshell, Eso are people of the noble class, whose leader, Aare Ona Kakanfo, ranks hierarchically third to Alaafin. Only a brave person can become "Eso." The total number of Eso, as historians have disclosed, is 70, and that each Eso commands a unit made up of 10 soldiers (Johnson 1969:73; Falola and Oguntomisin 25). Johnson indicates two classes of Eso: The upper class that consists 16 Eso (Gbonka, Esiele, Owota, Sadoe, Eso Oranyan, kogbona, Sakin, Eruku, Sagbedo, Ole, Odigbon, Gboingboin, Obago, Orunto, Sagbua, and Adaha) and the lower class that consists 54 eso. Both classes, when totaled up, produce 70 Eso who must yield to the command of the Kakanfò.

### **Duties of Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò:**

The Kakanfo's duty is scary, not many people would want to do it. That the individual Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò stands up to the task relating to his office, in spite of difficulty, makes him a hero. His major duty is presented as follows:

„Eto Are ni lati ri si idaabobo gbogbo ile Yoruba; eto re ni lati bi ogun t'o ba wa lati ita wo; eto re naa si ni lati gbogun lo ile miiran fun ikogun ati fun fifẹ ile Yoruba sehin si i. Oun ni o maa n pin ikogun fun oba ati awon ijeye ati awon Balogun abe re” (Aderinkomi 1986:11).

### **Meaning:**

It is Are's responsibility to defend the entire Yoruba land; it is his duty to defeat external attacks; also, it is his duty to attack other places, to conquer them, and to expand the Yoruba territory. He is the person to distribute war booties to the king, to the chiefs, and to all commanders under him (Aderinkomi 11).

Traditionally, Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò should obey the command of Alááfin and engage in a war in every three years, in the dry season. He is expected to either win a war or die while fighting. Kakanfò's duty is to be in control of wars. Kakanfò uses the commanders under him to execute war plans, and he goes to the war front only when a war is too tense and difficult to fight. His duties make his office and personality heroic, for not many people can face death and discharge the kind of duties that go with the office of Aare Ona Kakanfo.

### **Binding on the Institution and the Title Holders:**

A number of restrictions are in place traditionally to regulate the Kakanfò institution and the holders of the title. First, Ààrẹ̀ Ònà-Kakanfò is constrained customarily to be installed by the king of Oyo, and, second, in a normal situation only one Kakanfò reigns at a time. Third, only Eso can be elevated to the position. In addition, the Yoruba tradition disallows Aare Ona-

Kakanfo to reside in Oyo City where Alaafin lives (Johnson 1969:74). According to the tradition, Are Ona-Kakanfo should be a resident of other places outside Oyo City. The purpose of this restriction is to avoid power tussle between him and Alaafin. Moreover, Aare Ona-Kakanfo, by law, must go to wage at least a war every two dry seasons or once in every three years, to any place Alaafin directs him, and must win the war or die and have his corpse taken to Alaafin within three months after starting the war. Furthermore, Aare Ona-Kakanfo should always be the overseer of the military forces and should issue commands (Aderinkomi 1986:11).

### **Contradiction to Binding: Views about Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò:**

People hold different, fearful views the Kakanfò. Many of them see Ààrẹ̀ as a person who combines two extreme behaviors – destructive and protective. To those that Ààrẹ̀ supports, he is a savior, but to those that Ààrẹ̀ opposes, he is recalcitrant, dangerous, harmful, bellicose, reckless, and inconsiderate. Adérinkòmí (1986:10) describes Ààrẹ̀ as a person whose presence makes his enemies piss in their pants, and Omololá (1987:42) states that Ààrẹ̀ becomes a protective person when he defends his people. While Aláàfin Abíódún Adégoólù got his protection through Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò Qyálàbi, Aláàfin Aólẹ̀, who committed suicide, saw Kakanfo as a traitor because Kakanfò Àfònjá formed a gang that rebelled against his authority. Another example of contrasting view of Kakanfò reflects in Kakanfò Kúrunmí of Ìjáyẹ̀ who opposed the installation of Adélù as the new Aláàfin and became an enemy of the authority at the center (Òyó City). While Aláàfin was not satisfied because of Kúrunmí's opposing posture, the people of Ìjáyẹ̀ liked the Kakanfò and the position the latter kept.

A common belief among the Yoruba is that Kakanfo is supernaturally powerful, that the rituals that accompany his installation constitute the source of his power, so Kakanfo is always held in awe; people hardly want to cross his path. A common Yorùbá song that signals that people fear Kakanfò goes as follows:

Ààrẹ̀!  
 Ààrẹ̀!  
 Ààrẹ̀!  
 Orí mi, má jẹ̀ n se Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò.  
 Ààrẹ̀! (3ce)

Meaning:

Ààrẹ̀!  
 Ààrẹ̀!  
 Ààrẹ̀!  
 My being (inner head), don't let me offend Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò.  
 Ààrẹ̀! (3ce)

The Yorùbá believe that Kakanfò is unpredictable, that he could kick against anything- even the choice determined through Ifá divination, so they always await his command. That is why the Yorùbá like saying, “Ààrẹ̀ n pè o. Ò n difá! Bífá bá fòrẹ̀, bí Ààrẹ̀ kò bá fòrẹ̀ n kó?” (Ààrẹ̀ sends for you, you are consulting Ifa oracle! What will happen when Ifa says a pleasant message but Ààrẹ̀' s response is unpleasant?).

### **The Relationship between Kankanfò and Aláàfin:**

Traditionally, Aláàfin is the sole authority to confer the title of Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò on any suitable ẹ̀sọ. This responsibility of Aláàfin makes Kakanfò subordinate to the king who orders him to go to war in every three years and to win or die there. Because both are traditionally powerful, as a sign of respect and a way to avoid conflict, they live far away from each other; Aláàfin lives in Oyo while Aare Ona Kakanfo resides in another place. In spite of the distance, there were instances when Ààrẹ̀ revolted against Aláàfin and fomented trouble for the king. Àfònjá and Kúrnmí are examples of Kakanfò who went against Aláàfin. Both Aláàfin and Kakanfò are supposed to play a complimentary role and respect each other and realize the limitation of their power if their mutual agreement would yield any good results. Aláàfin Abíódún Adegoolu had a cordial relationship with Oyálábi, and Aláàfin Gbádégesin enjoyed a good relationship with Kakanfò Samuel Ládòkè Akíntólá, and Aláàfin Lámídi and Kakanfò Moshood Abíólá were in good terms.

### **Oriki as the Source of Spur and Image Making for Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà kakanfò:**

Traditionally, the Yorùbá cherish the use of “oriki,” a form of oral entertaining praise poetry which serves as a repository of history, events, praises, warnings, sound achievements, sweet failure, and special peculiarities of lineages and individual persons who become artistic objects in the hands of the Yoruba verbal artistes. The Aare Ona Kakanfo is no exception. The “oriki” of all Kakanfò impresses on all people the concept of military heroism among the Yoruba and helps the performance of the Kakanfò. The common ideas the *oriki* of the Kakanfò packages are bravery, tact, mastery, command, and tendency to plan and execute military actions. “Oriki” spurs the Kakanfò to endlessly engage in battles or live up to the expectation of his office. The overall image of Kakanfò “oriki” presents is the military and political authority that involves force, control, and heroic, military deeds.

### **Danger Associated with the Title:**

The Kakanfò’s military duty, like the western military commanders, exposes him to personal and group defense, death, blood letting, devilish plan, aggression, invasion, powerful movements, and the control of the military regiments, and war escalation. His ability to function in this type of scenario and to face difficult situations makes him a hero among the Yorùbá.

### **Death of Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò:**

In the western world, a soldier that is worth his salt would not entertain fear because of war. The same is applicable in the Yoruba land. Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò does not fear death arising from wars. By commission, he is to fight a war to the point of death, to return alive or dead. Most of them died violently or in difficult situations, so society expects Kakanfò to face a troublous or turbulent end. For example, Mashood Kasimaawo Abíólá believed so much in his influence and in the public support for him, so as an attempt to realize his annulled mandate, he refused to listen to the discouraging voice of the Nigeria-led military junta; he aroused the interest of the world in his course, and preferred to fight his course to its end, but in the process of getting freedom from the military imposed “imprisonment”, he died suddenly. As a typical Aare Ona-Kakanfo, he stood for what he believed. Tactically, he did as if he was to mellow down because of the military’s



tough stance on the election. However, suddenly, he showed his bravery when he declared himself the president of Nigeria. His earlier comment that he could not die could be interpreted as the Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò's tactical approach to attack enemies at the least expected moment. The majority of the Kakanfò died in violent, heroic circumstances. Did he fight back physically like Afonja who fought gallantly and died in the process? This is a question which only the modern situation can interpret and which is open to further research since he passed away while he was captured by coup d'état plotters who ruled in Nigeria then.

### **Is the Title Relevant Today?**

The institution of the Aláàfin, the sole authority over the appointment of Kakanfò, is no longer very powerful as it used to be before 1889 when the Alaafin signed a peace treaty with other tribes and succumbed to the British system of government which took over the control of the Yoruba land. Because of the reduction in the power and land territory of the Alaafin today, the traditional Yoruba army is no longer really visible though some traditional military titles are still alive and the king does ceremoniously give them to those who deserve them. This situation might make people say there is no longer a need to appoint Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò. Also, the cloudy dust -violence or disturbance- that preceded the death of the last two occupiers of the position – Samuel Ladoke Akintola and Moshood Kasimaawo Olawale Abiola- and the nature of their death might also serve as justification for debunking this traditional title. Ladoke was killed by the military junta during a coup d'état while Abiola died in captivity as the United Nations representatives to Nigeria were negotiating his release from the brutal military dictator, General Sanni Abacha.

However, since the institution of the Aláàfin has drastically changed and adjusted to modernity, the institution of the Kakanfò should be kept alive because of its significance in the history of the Yoruba, the challenge modern politics poses in Nigeria, and the impact the title holder can make. The Kakanfò could be a unifying factor in making a political decision that goes beyond the Yoruba land in the context of other ethnic groups if a right person bears the title. M. K. O. Abiola is a good example. He was able to pull the majority of the Nigerian ethnic groups along when he contested the 1993 presidential election which he successfully won though he was prevented from ruling Nigeria because General Ibrahim Babangida, a military dictator and self-styled president, annulled the election which was globally recognized as the most successful election in Nigeria. The heroic aspect of the title is part of the Yoruba concept of military and political heroism; therefore, the continuation of the institution is imperative because of the modern challenges that require a competent hand to handle on behalf of the entire Yoruba engaging in the competitive, slippery “political path” of Nigeria.

### **Demarcation between History and Tradition of Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò:**

Past Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò title holders manned the office at difference times, so the events of their times vary and reflect in their history. Their situations and how they handled them form their history and present their personalities. The only common ground to them was their ceremonious installation by a king. The special installation process is the traditional aspect of Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò.

## Conclusion

The history of and the tradition revolving around the Yoruba Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò serve as the communication which builds the Yoruba idea of traditional military heroism, suggesting that a hero is a military person who is constantly fomenting trouble, defending his people, expanding territories, unyielding, bloodthirsty, commandeering, dominating, and pulling one crowd against another. In the modern time, the new political situation which makes different people to exist under the same system, which is modern and multi-cultural, has brought about a new expectation of the public about Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò. The old title holders, as history passes on, were people of exceptional, traditional military ability and commitment to physical wars, and the most recent -the modern Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò title holders, as their history relays, are regarded as national, modern political leaders, power brokers, and influential individuals whose recognition and role have extended beyond the Yoruba land. Generally, whether old or modern, the Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò would not mind on stepping on other people's toes, to achieve his goals even if doing so would cost him his life. The Yoruba regard the duties of office and the rituals accompanying Kakanfò's installation as a propeller or an injector of boldness which makes every Kakanfò fearless to face obstacles and take bloody and death-connected risks.

The selection of the most gallant *ẹ̀sọ* to man the position is the prerogative right of the Alààfin who is traditionally forbidden to allow the Kakanfò to live with him in the Òyó City because of Kakanfò's tendency to foment trouble. The duties, rituals, people's belief, and insignia that go with the office of Kakanfò make the title holders to be fearless and war-ready heroes in the eyes of the public they serve. The institution has been bent to accommodate modern changes. The demand posed by the modern politics in Nigeria, the need to preserve culture, and the intermittent power tussles among ethnic groups in Nigeria make the institution of the Kakanfò a subject of relevance today though the modern Kakanfò can not hold military weapons as the modern-day soldiers and the *ẹ̀sọ* of the past would do because Nigeria Army is now responsible for the security of Nigeria in which the Yoruba land is located. In spite of changes in and people's fear about the institution, Kakanfò is an institutional heroic symbol of the past and present power struggles, and, as such, those who value the tradition and history would want the tradition to be preserved for the present and future generations. However, the Yoruba should realize that they now co-exist with other peoples, so they should encourage their Kakanfò who may be the successor to the last office holder, Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakanfò Abilọ́la, to use dialogues or diplomacy to solve conflicts instead of engaging in war. Can diplomacy serve as the substitute weapon for Ààrẹ̀ Ònà-Kakanfò of the modern day? History and tradition, as constructors of situations, events, and role players, will tell.

## NOTES

The "n" in "Kakanfò" should have the same diacritic which appears on the last letter of the word. Also, "o" in "Abiola" and "eso" should have a diacritic under it. The computer used for typing this work lacked the diacritic.

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